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ABSTRACT

A cooperative program in the state of Washington involves a university offering freshman English writing courses on a high school campus. The program, in which the university establishes curriculum textbook choices and student performance expectations, offers students greater flexibility and assurance of college credit than does the Advanced Placement Program established by the College Entrance Examination Board. The program also features a university faculty member acting as liaison to the high school and student selection based on teacher recommendations and previous performance in English. In questionnaires completed at the end of the first and second years the program was offered, predominately positive responses to the course came from students, parents, school board members, teachers, the principal, and the school district superintendent. Liabilities of the program include: (1) an excessive work load for the high school English teacher selected to teach the university level course: (2) difficulty in maintaining a suitably serious atmosphere in a high school environment: (3) teacher dominated class discussions: and (4) dealing with the territorial jealousy displayed by high school teachers of "regular" English classes. The hoped-for byproduct of updating those teachers' methods of teaching writing has not been achieved. (AEA)

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A FRAGILE COALITION: UNIVERSITY AND HIGH SCHOOL

Within the rain shadow of the Olympic Mountains, at the north end of the Olympic Peninsula, sprawls the town of Sequim (pronounced SKWIM, pop. 2,510). Known for its low annual rainfall, its high proportion of retired people--especially middle-aged military retirees--and its access to hunting, fishing, and mountain exploration, Sequim has a school system that gets considerable public attention. A sizeable politically and religiously conservative element in the community exerts pressure to stick to the old ways. Another more highly educated group encourages the school board to try some innovative procedures and to enrich the curriculum in every possible way.

In 1978, responding to the latter group and to published reports by the Association of Secondary School Principals, the Sequim high school principal and the district superintendent approached the University of Washington with an unusual request. "Would the University, and the Department of English in particular, be willing to offer a freshman English course at Sequim High School (1100 students) during 1978-79 for credit from the University of Washington?" The reasons given were to provide greater challenge to capable high school seniors and to allow students to accumulate valuable college credit from what they considered a prestigious institution.

So far as anyone at the University could remember, such an arrangement with a high school had never existed, and there were several reasons for viewing the request skeptically. Could suitable academic standards be

maintained? Who would teach the course, and what would that person's faculty status at the University be? Why should the University be interested in extending its already overtaxed and underfunded services to another off-campus location? And certainly with the tradition-oriented English Department skepticism prevailed.

Yet, the proposal was not rejected out of hand. After additional correspondence, an "on-site" visit by English Department faculty, an on-campus meeting with University and school district faculty and administrators, and some scratching of heads, the request was initially refused, then, after renewed pleading from the high school principal, accepted on a one-year trial basis.

So, during the 1978-79 school year, Sequim High School became the first and only secondary school to be offering, for extension credit, English 111, "College Writing: Writing about Literature," and English 181, "College Writing: Expository Prose." Students who completed each of these courses successfully were assured of receiving five hours of credit (a total of ten possible) from the University of Washington, presumably as fully transferable to other colleges and universities as any other University credit.

As of September, 1980, the program was scheduled to operate for a third successive year, with most of the initial selection, liaison, and credit procedures still intact. Periodic evaluation checks with all those most directly concerned--students, their parents, faculty, and administrators--have shown predominant approval and even a recognition that such a program has genuine merit.

Contrast with Advanced Placement

A number of years ago, the College Entrance Examination Board established the Advanced Placement Program to provide a similar service, with college credit as the bait to make "academic challenge" more than an attractive but perhaps not "practical" promise. But that program in English has often seemed to overemphasize literature and literary analysis and, of course, not to assure a close working relationship with one college or university. And, award of college credit through APP depends entirely on performance on one examination, with standards for award of credit varying among colleges.

The Sequim program, based on a different and more nearly tailor-made model, has both greater flexibility and greater assurance of credit built in. Furthermore, it establishes a potentially important precedent for high school-university cooperation, a constant need and sore point in Washington and most other states.

Credit obtained through APP is cheaper, though. Whereas in that program students typically pay only an examination fee, in the Sequim program they pay full extension credit tuition (negotiated separately by the University for each extension credit course but currently standing at $118 per semester course for Sequim students).

Establishing Curriculum and Performance Expectations

According to the original agreement and continuing preference of all concerned, the curriculum and textbook choices are established by the University Department of English. (At UW, most sections of the six elective

freshman English courses are taught by graduate students. A Freshman English Committee, comprised of graduate students and departmental faculty, revises the curriculum and makes an annual review of texts.) The teacher is a regular member of the high school faculty (designated "Extension Lecturer" at UW Continuing Education); a member of the Department of English faculty (the present writer) acts as travelling liaison to the high school, "seeing that University standards are maintained," as the district superintendent put it.

While the teacher is free to select readings from the designated texts, to devise assignments, and to administer evaluation devices--just as UW teaching assistants in English do--most of these decisions are made in consultation with the liaison person. During eight school-year visits to the high school, that person visits the college English class, as it is called, talks with the teacher and other school personnel, and reads students' essays. He has also occasionally led class discussions and answered students' questions in order to establish a palpable sense of being connected to the University.

Perhaps the most significant act, so far as assuring performance standards is concerned, is the reading and evaluating of students' essays. The students know that the high school teacher is not the only judge of their compositional efforts and that the University liaison probably represents a higher performance standard than they might otherwise seek. In order to establish stability and continuity in criteria for evaluating writing, the college English class teacher and the University liaison worked out a form which includes seven criteria (such as, "Shows thoughtful consideration of topic" and "Achieves adequacy of development of topic") and a four-point

semantic differential evaluation scale for each criterion (e.g., "considerable depth of thought" vs. "superficial thought" and "rich" vs. "impoverished").

Rating the essays in groups twice each semester, the two English teachers reach separate judgments and then compare their judgments to arrive at a course grade. (Because he believes that grading each essay just after it is written can be inhibiting and misleading to students, the University liaison has encouraged the college class teacher to depart from accustomed high school practice of grading every scrap of written work.) It is this regular monitoring of students' written work--in all-day reading sessions at the high school--that provides a close check on performance and permits a comparison with the work of on-campus students (with whom the liaison has daily contact).

Selection of Students

In classes that have ranged in size between 19 and 25, students have been selected chiefly on the basis of previous performance in English classes. Most claim that they are college-bound and that they want the advertised extra intellectual challenge. If they are unable to come up with the money for tuition and purchase of texts, the principal has assured needy students that school funds are available for those purposes.

In some cases, students have been admitted into the class without a strong record of previous performance in reading and writing. Most, however, have been the acknowledged top students in the school--the student body president, the NCTE Achievement Awards winner, the newspaper and yearbook editors, the best athlete-scholar.

The Assets

In anonymous questionnaires completed in May of 1979 and 1980, students in both classes responded with predominantly positive comments. Asked why they enrolled for the course, most said they wanted to earn college credit and to improve their writing ability. Since it had been explained to them in the spring of their junior year that the college English class would yield ten hours of college credit (which at that point in most academically oriented students' lives looks very enticing) and that they would write more than they ever had before in their lives, they at least remembered those reasons a year later.

With the exception of two or three students who withdrew from school before graduation, all have received UW credit. Only one has thus far had trouble in having the credit transfer to another university.

Asked about the effect of the course on their writing, reading, and discussion skills, they responded thus:

"As a result of being in this class,

	Yes	
	1978-79	1979-80
I am more aware of techniques of writing essays;	74%	96%
I am more aware of criteria and ways of judging good prose writing;	75%	96%
I get more satisfaction from my own writing than I did a year ago;	71%	91%
I read with greater attention to the writer's techniques;	70%	61%
I read with greater comprehension of meanings in prose;	69%	83%
I have more relevant reactions to ideas that I can inject into discussions;	72%	83%
I generally feel confident and comfortable about expressing reactions to ideas in class sessions."	75%	61%

In an open-ended response to a request for highlights of being in the class, the largest numbers of responses centered on individual achievements and the class atmosphere. Students cited noticeable (to them) improvements in writing skill, the opportunity to keep a journal which produced much personal satisfaction, exposure to thought-provoking books, and stimulation to continue writing and reading at high (compared with usual high school standards) quantity and quality. One student, apparently not alone in appreciation, said, "Nobody in the class is a dope."

Parents of students in the 1978-79 class were asked to rank their perceptions of the reasons for offering the class. Given five main reasons and space for stating others, the largest proportion (77%) ranked first the following reason: "The class gives more challenge than 'normal' English classes." The second highest proportion (38%) ranked this reason as third: "Seniors tend to get lazy and to need work to combat 'senioritis.'"

Instead of being asked about overall approval or disapproval of the class, parents were asked to state in writing what effects they had observed on their sons' or daughters' approach to writing (e.g., frequency of writing, struggle in writing, ease in writing, satisfaction in writing). Only one wrote "none." Others expressed what appear to be exclusively positive remarks, assuming one parent's comment, "a definite struggle in writing," to reflect the reality of serious expository writing for most students. Others cited increased analytical ability, greater interest and satisfaction, more critical powers, greater awareness of the "many methods an author uses to get his message across to his readers."

All three members of the Sequim school board ranked first the same reason for having the class that parents had designated. "Senioritis,"

which the high school principal had mentioned several times in conversation and which some parents saw as a common problem, was ranked by only one school board member, and that person regarded it as the least important reason. The board favored continuation of the program with no changes "unless," as one put it, "we can involve more students." (In the second year, the class size did increase, chiefly because there were more students whom teachers regarded as qualified.)

Of the thirty high school teachers, the largest proportion (93%) agreed with parents and school board that the chief reason for having the course was to provide more challenge than "normal" English classes. Fifty per cent, however, also ranked as the principal reason the statement "English teachers want to teach more challenging students and more challenging subject matter and skills." Asked whether they thought the program should be continued, without cost to the school district, an appreciable majority (83%) said yes. Those who offered reasons most commonly cited the need in a typical high school program to provide greater intellectual stimulation for highly competent students.

The high school principal and the district superintendent also ranked greater challenge as the chief reason for having the course, the principal adding, "It assists in holding a high standard of education and gives the student new insight in what to expect at college level; it helps to mature.". The superintendent saw as a major strength of the program the principal's "strong interest . . . [he] was supportive, a key to success." And the principal summarized by saying, "It really went exceptionally well, and we felt that the high school and the university had a beautiful working relationship." (A part of that relationship was established by arranging to

bring students in the college English class to visit University English classes. Spending most of one full day in April or May on the University campus, students got a rare first-hand feel for classroom styles and the ambience of a huge (37,500) metropolitan university.)

The two Sequim teachers who have thus far instructed the college English class had the most detailed and subtle comments about the experience of introducing college work into a high school environment. By no means wholly positive about it, they cited more satisfactions than dissatisfactions. They agreed that they were able to conduct more penetrating discussions than in "normal" classes; that writing assignments were more numerous, more demanding, and more thoroughly evaluated; and that students seemed generally pleased with the idea of being in a more challenging class.

From the perspective of the liaison person, none of the assets claimed by the foregoing observers are exaggerated, though a faith that such a program has value is probably the single most important requisite (as it may be indeed for any educational effort which does not involve explicitly "vocational" skills of a craftsperson). Students in the class generally exuded a combined pride and humility at facing challenging intellectual tasks. They appreciated being "pushed" while also voicing a fair share of complaints about too much work and too little time to do it. And for some the movement toward more thorough development of ideas in more coherent and more flavorful writing was apparent.

The Liabilities

Continuation of this program is renegotiated each year; no one assumes that last year's mostly positive assessment will spawn next year's automatic

approval. To anyone who knows at first-hand the elements that go into flourishing school instruction, it will not be a surprise to cite the teacher as the keystone in the structure.

Even though Sequim High School maintained a slight better student-teacher ratio (about 125 to 1) than most high school English teachers have, as well as two full-time teacher aides, the workload for the college English teacher far exceeds that for the University teacher. There were no allowances made for additional preparation time or for written response to student essays, and the additional load was at least double that for a typical high school class. Consequently, unless the responsibility for teaching the college English class is shared in future years among the senior high school English teachers (unlikely to happen because of backgrounds of training and aptitude), the designated teacher will flee from the privilege, prestige and intellectual stimulation notwithstanding.

Another major liability is the maintenance of a suitably serious atmosphere. As the teacher put it after the first year,

> A student enrolled in a college-level course on a high school campus still thinks of himself as a high school student. He brings into class with him his high school involvement in other classes and in activities, his concerns about college applications and decisions, and his social and work activities outside school. He lacks interaction with other college students in other college courses, thus magnifying his anxiety about one course rather than dispersing his concerns over several. He lacks the breadth of intellectual thought he would encounter on a college campus, and his writing topics can be only those to which he relates as a high school student. While this fact in itself does not deny him the ability to excel, it does limit his opportunity; only the very best and most dedicated students can overcome this fact. Not all students in the college English class were able to perform with this seriousness of purpose.

This teacher thought that students in the 1979-80 college English class were markedly more serious and productive. Nevertheless, it is obvious that

hardly any American high school provides an academic ambience even appraoching that at a first-rate university. An element of silliness was always near the surface in even this class of top students, some of it engendered by the volatile high school society and some a function of being seventeen or eighteen years old and not nineteen, twenty, or more, with the breadth of experience and self-concept that may coincide with those ages. "College work" pursued in high school, especially in a field like English, can therefore never be wholly comparable to that done in residence at a university.

Students were probably reflecting this difference, though not entirely consciously, when they wrote anonymous comments about changes they would like to see in the class. Several admitted their tendency to procrastinate in starting and completing writing assignments (a condition not unknown among "real" university students) and pled for tighter deadlines and more vigorous teacher insistence on their observance.

Perhaps even more significant for teaching style and the impression of doing college-level work were the comments of several students about conduct of class discussions. From the liaison person's observation, it was apparent that the teacher dominated most classroom meetings, explicating literature, giving background information, asking questions whose answers she had largely pre-determined. While these too are not uncommon practices among university specialists, they often tend to overwhelm the student and mislead him or her into believing that college-level work consists solely of listening to an instructor's synthesized insights. The dialectic of genuine discussion is absent, and students miss the important maturing experience of formulating, articulating, and critiquing various interpretations of an idea expressed in a piece of writing. Unless this genuinely

exploratory style of teaching prevails in "normal" high school classes--and it usually does not--to make it bloom in a "college" English class seems difficult.

Other liabilities as perceived by high school teachers involve what may be territorial jealousy or even "philosophical differences." One anonymous teacher wrote: "This is a high school campus and these students should be challenged through their regular English curriculum ["regular" apparently meaning whatever has been deemed suitable for the majority] to better prepare them for college rather than bringing college down to the high school." Another tartly observed, "having it [the college English class] points to inadequacy of our own English program." While these still evidently amount to minority opinions among the faculty--all of whom acknowledge their strong-willed and conscientious principal as chief architect of the program--they reflect a continuing need to sort out the conflicting motives for officially labelling one high school class as "college-level" and dignifying it with university credit. As always, these motives are not purely academic or intellectual.

A motive for beginning the program that was claimed by at least some members of the UW Department of English faculty, the liaison among them, was the hope of helping to improve the teaching of writing in the school district and perhaps the region. To that end, the liaison person cautiously discussed the teaching of writing with other English teachers in the school. Further, he organized and taught an in-service course on the teaching of writing in elementary and secondary schools during winter and spring, 1979 (a ten-session course using as consultants teachers from the Puget Sound Writing Project). While twenty-three teachers from several districts,

some of them from Sequim, signed up for and completed the course, only one of the Sequim High School teachers did so, the others claiming lack of time or already sufficient knowledge of the field. From the liaison person's observations, however, most of the methods of teaching writing in the high school are archaic. Only very gradually, if at all, is the presence of the college English class likely to affect the teaching of English generally. This effect, it seems, is principally a function of inter-personal relationships among the adults involved and cannot be an assumed aim of such a program.

The skepticism referred to earlier in this article still exists. Perhaps the college English program is the stuff of public relations. Maybe the tenuous relationship between the high school and university--affected by physical distance, by the ever-delicate bond of trust and mutual respect, by the willingness of those most directly involved to continue giving of themselves beyond the demands of ordinary duty--will not persist. The students themselves may come to value college credits and the lure of "challenge" less.

But skepticism in academic matters seems preferable to boosterism. And as the tone of this article has perhaps suggested, the preferable attitude toward "bringing college down to high school" is one of cautious optimism.